Mr. Luciano Spanish III  
**The Imperfect Tense**

1. **Forms of the imperfect, regular verbs.**

Stem: Take the infinitive, and remove the last two letters (the infinitive ending):   
          **hablar** > **habl-**; **comer** > **com-**; **vivir** > **viv-**.

Endings: **-ar** verbs: **-aba**, **-abas**, **-aba**, **-ábamos**, **-abais**, **-aban.  
             -er** and **-ir** verbs: **-ía**, **-ías**, **-ía**, **-íamos**, **-íais**, **-ían**.

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| [**hablar**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/HABLAR.HTM) | | |  | [**comer**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/COMER.HTM) | | |  | [**vivir**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/VIVIR.HTM) | | |
| hablaba |  | hablábamos | comía |  | comíamos | vivía |  | vivíamos |
| hablabas | hablabais | comías | comíais | vivías | vivíais |
| hablaba | hablaban | comía | comían | vivía | vivían |

1. **Irregular verbs.** Only three verbs are irregular in the imperfect: [**ser**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/SER.HTM), [**ir**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/IR.HTM), and [**ver**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/VER.HTM):

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [**ser**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/SER.HTM) | | |  | [**ir**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/IR.HTM) | | |  | [**ver**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/VER.HTM) | | |
| era |  | éramos |  | iba |  | íbamos |  | veía |  | veíamos |
| eras | erais |  | ibas | ibais |  | veías | veíais |
| era | eran |  | iba | iban |  | veía | veían |

1. **Meaning and usage.** The imperfect is one of two simple (that is, “non-compound”) past tenses in the indicative. It is used:
   1. To indicate an action or state viewed as being *in progress* in the past.

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| **Yo cantaba mi canción favorita.** |  | *I was singing my favorite song.* |
| **Estábamos muy cansados.** | *We were (feeling) very tired.* |

* 1. To indicate a customary or repeated action or state in the past.

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| **Cada domingo íbamos al parque.** |  | *Every Sunday we used to go to the park.* |
| **De vez en cuando me miraban.** | *They would look at me from time to time.* |

* 1. To indicate the time of day (and ordinarily the day of the week, date, etc.) when talking about the past. [Note that this is really a sub-category of A above.]

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| **Eran las seis de la mañana.** |  | *It was six o'clock a.m.* |
| **Era lunes, el cinco de junio.** | *It was Monday, June 5th*. |

* 1. To give descriptions in the past or paint the background (the imperfect sets the stage on which another action —typically given in the preterit— was performed). [Note that this is really another sub-category of A above.]

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| **Ella tenía hambre, y no había nada en la refrigeradora.** |  | *She was hungry, and there was nothing in the refrigerator.* |
| **(Por eso fue a comprar algo.)** | (*So she went* [preterite] *to buy something.*) |

1. **Special usage:** ***hacer* with expressions of time.**

To indicate an action which started in (prior) past time and which is viewed as still continuing in past time, the imperfect is used. In English this is often expressed with “for” plus a period of time, with the verb in the past perfect progressive.

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| **Hacía tres horas que trabajaba** |  | *I had been working for three hours* |
| **(cuando algo extraño pasó).** | (*when something strange happened*). |
| or: |  |
| **Trabajaba desde hacía tres horas** | *I had been working for three hours* |
| **(cuando algo extraño pasó).** | (*when something strange happened*). |

Notes:

* 1. In these expressions of time, you can use **hacía ... que** before the verb, or **desde hacía** after the verb, as shown in two examples given above.
  2. The imperfect tense is basically the present tense backshifted to past time; remember that the present tense —not the present perfect— is used to indicate an action begun in simple past time and continuing on into the present:

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| **Hace tres horas que trabajo.** |  | *I have been working for three hours.* |

To ask “How long had (something been happening)”, use **¿Cuánto tiempo hacía que...**:

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| **¿Cuánto tiempo hacía que usted viajaba por México?** |  | *How long had you been traveling around Mexico?* |

Alternate method. Instead of using **hacer**, it is also possible to use the verb **llevar** + period of time + gerund. [**Llevar**](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/verbs/LLEVAR.HTM) is likewise used in the imperfect:

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| **Llevaba tres horas trabajando.** | |  | *I had been working for three hours.* | |
| **¿Cuánto tiempo llevabas viajando por México?** | | *How long had you been traveling around Mexico?* | |
| [[Practice](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/courses/S210/IMPERF2.HTM)] |  | | | [[S210 Main Page](http://users.ipfw.edu/jehle/S210.HTM)] | |

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